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# INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Vol. XII No. I

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A CRITICISM  
OF THE  
LEFT COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

A SUPRESSED CHAPTER  
FROM THE  
HISTORY OF TROTSKYISM  
PART II -HUGO OEHLER

REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS  
LEAGUE  
U. S. A.



# A SUPPRESSED CHAPTER FROM THE HISTORY OF TROTSKYISM-HUGO OEHLER

## PART 2

After these quotations and arguments, not after the event, but before the events as dates and original letters will prove we should now return to Cannon's "History" and see how he handles this phase of the development.

"Our organizational proposals, which we submitted to the American Workers party in our third meeting went a long way to facilitate unification. We always believed that the program decides everything." (P. 179) Program decides everything, yes this is correct, but the majority were arguing verbally that "we" may be forced to unite even without a Marxian Program. Since the left wing forced this through Cannon speaks as though it was always so, like the rock of Gibraltar. But anyone who can liquidate into the Socialist Party, as Cannon and others did, into a party with a non-Marxian program, who issued no material or literature of their own; and on the contrary, who distributed the Socialist press and voted for the Socialist Party candidate, Norman Thomas—can unite with a Marxian program. If it is theoretically correct to liquidate an independent PARTY (The WORKERS PARTY) as Cannon did into the Socialist Party, then it is theoretically permissible to unite with another group, WITHOUT A MARXIAN PROGRAM.

Cannon said, "The project of fusion with the Mustites was the same thing in different form, but the Oehlerites didn't recognize it—precisely because the form was different. They forgave us the fusion with Muste, but with great trepidation, fear and prophecies of bad things to come of mixing with strange people." (P. 187) Such tripe. We were always for fusion; but only after nine months of pounding them into line and getting a Marxian MINIMUM program. We were for unity (but Mustie did not know) but we knew of the French turn and the plans of Cannon and Shactman and we wanted to build an independent party. Not build to later liquidate into the SP— as was the outcome. Our fear and prophecies came true in the negative—the smashing of the promising Workers Party and its liquidation into the SP by Cannon and Company. What Cannon and Shactman lost in this maneuver in expulsions, splits, walk outs and going home and theory, is much more in time and manpower than was gained in the SP—and now in the idea of a LABOR PARTY. Muste alone was worth more than many dozen Cannon now has. Cannon, Shactman, helped drive Muste to his present position.

Muste, like the old school of IWW and socialists at the turn of the century, had personal integrity and his words were as good as gold. Not so with Cannon and Shactman. This turned Muste sour. I agree with Muste on this point, a man's word must be "as good as gold".

I have already pointed out that the left wing tried to obtain a minimum Marxian program. Now I will give you more. I remember clearly as though it was yesterday when Max brought back the draft he and Muste had worked out. I read it over and then talked to comrades of our own caucus. It was sickening. We had agreed that we would only unite if it was a Marxian program; but this was below it. Our faction started what the majority considered a bitter fight and correctly so. After a knock-down and drag out fight (Cannon coming in on the tail end of it, returning from Paris) we won our points and got our amendments across. But



the left wing, and especially Oehler, were never forgiven for this. I now quote in full the document we sent out on this phase of the struggle. It is long, but vital from a political point of view. I am not including the TECHNICAL AMENDMENTS to this document. The fact that the last draft included our points and we voted for it is sufficient without burdening you with more than this long document. Here it is:

# DRAFT PROGRAMMATIC DECLARATION FOR THE NEW PARTY October 29, 1934

The draft programmatic declaration for the new party that has been presented by the joint committee of the Communist League of America and the American Workers' Party is subject to further modification between now and the unification convention. The document must first pass thru the national committee, the membership and finally the convention of each organization. In this time the document will be modified. But in which direction depends on the pressure exerted by the centrists and the Marxist element. The organization which is able to exert the greater pressure will modify the declaration in accordance with its tendency.

At the first joint committee meeting that considered the document a VERBAL agreement was reached on a minimum Marxian programmatic declaration. Muste and Shachtman were appointed a subcommittee to put it in writing. After a week of intense work by the subcommittee and several corrections by our NEC the written draft was finally brought up to what it is now. The written draft is LESS than the verbal agreement. The draft is considered by comrades Shachtman and Swabeck to be a satisfactory basis on which to unite. Abern moved in the N.C. that it be corrected if possible, while Oehler considers the present draft an inadequate basis for unity. Between the positions of Shachtman and Swabeck on the one hand, and the position of Abern, on the other, there is only a difference of degree. The position of Oehler differs radically from both the position of Swabeck and Shachtman and the position of Abern.

The present draft must be improved, must be made at least a minimum Marxian programmatic declaration. As it stands now it is below a minimum and can be successfully attacked on some of its formulations of the fundamental concepts of Marxism by the Stalinists and the Social Democrats to say nothing of the other groups in the country and in the international working class movement. Unification with the AWP must take place on the basis of a minimum Marxian program to give all Marxists in the new party regardless of where they come from a correct Marxist base to defend Marxism not only against centrist or reformist tendencies in the new party but also against the Stalinists and the Socialists.

The Draft presents some of the most fundamental concepts of Marxism thru the medium of centrist formulation and methods. On the one hand, the document contains formulations that enable both centrists and Marxists to read in their formulas. In other words these are centrist formulations. On the other hand the document contains two formulas on the same point, a centrist formula and a formula that can pass for the Marxist formula. In other words the draft is so constructed on some points that both centrists and Marxists can hang up their hats on the same peg, expound their different doctrines, and feel at home under the same



programmatic roof. In short the programmatic declaration is a centrist document and if it is accepted as it stands, and as the N.C. proposes, as the programmatic basis of the new party, the new party will be not a Marxist party, but a centrist party.

If our international organization which exists as an important theoretical or organizational force, were to send one section into a reformist or centrist party as a tactical maneuver that did not involve the question of the liquidation of our world party or group, we would enter as an organized faction, with our own program, our own press, and carry on activity for our program.

But the unification with the AWP is an entirely different organizational step. The League is not going to enter this new party as an organized faction on its own special program, publicly announced, and with its own special press. The League is going to unite with a Centrist group on (altho we are the larger organization) the basis of parity in the leading committees and posts. There will be one program and one press in the new party.

If the party is to be a Marxist party the programmatic declaration must be a minimum Marxian document. \*\*When centrists and Marxists unite upon a minimum Marxian program the party is a Marxist party with centrists in its ranks.

The force that obtains the program it wants—centrist or Marxist—will have the key position in the inevitable internal struggle of the Marxists to assimilate the centrists that will follow. On the basis of a centrist document our comrades, all the Marxists in the party—cannot effectively fight against the revisionist character of the articles for our press, theoretical organ, and the subject matter of our forums, study courses and other activity offered up and conducted by the centrist elements. All this material can radically effect the character and clarity of the propaganda and slogans of the new party in a centrist direction. All of this revisionist material can and will claim the stamp of approval of the party for it will have a base in the centrist formulations of the program and will be legal in the party. And it will go out to the masses in the name of Marxism.

The following Marxian concepts are modified and presented in typical centrist fashion:

1. The Dictatorship of the Proletariat. At the end of the first paragraph of the section Consolidation of Workers Rule, it reads, "Thus the workers state, while assuring and continually extending far more genuine and substantial democratic rights to all those who accept the new orders than ever enjoyed by the masses under capitalism, will function as a dictatorship of the entire working class."

The weight of this section is on workers' democracy, not on the idea of the workers' state as a repressive instrument against the enemy classes. To some it may appear as a mere matter of emphasis or stylistic formulation. But it is in reality a formulation designed to permit the

\*\*The one presented by our NEC in conjunction with the AWP is not. It is a centrist document.



revisionism of people like Hook who, with the support of the AWP, conceive the workers' state as a democracy which will fight its class enemies when it is attacked to preserve this democracy. The formulation in the program opens the door for a revisionist conception of the workers' state. Under this formulation Hilquit's formula of the workers' state as a workers' democracy can be upheld and "clever Marxists" can also speak in our formula.

2. The Conquest of Power. Every word of this section has been taken from the second draft of the AWP program. The whole section is weak, washed out, centrist position. After speaking of the Workers' Councils taking power the draft says: "This will be no violation of essential democratic principles, for it is not the existing governmental forms, representing the interests only of the capitalist minority, but the Workers' Councils, that express the political and social interests of the socially productive element of the nation." This apologetic presentation is not the bold language of revolutionary thought. Worse! In this sentence, too, is the germ of Hook's idea of the workers' State which is likewise expressed in the passage on the Consolidation of Workers' Rule.

But here it is even clearer. The workers' state far from being in essence a dictatorship is presented here as a "genuine" democracy. Moreover the entire revolution is presented here as a struggle for democracy!---the Workers' Councils originate in the defensive struggle against capitalism for democratic rights, take power and then establish "genuine" democracy!

We do not object to the idea that the workers' state will afford democracy for millions who are denied it under capitalism. But democracy is not given a class basis in the draft. It is presented in typical liberalistic fashion, as an eternal, abstract principle or category.

How far this is from Marxism can be seen from the following quotation from The State and Revolution: "Democracy is not identical with majority rule. No, Democracy is a State which recognizes the subjection of the minority to the majority, that is, an organization for the systematic use of violence by one class against the other, by one part of the population against the other."

Unlike this quotation the weight of the section on the conquest of power leans heavily against the idea of every "democracy" being, in reality, at bottom, fundamentally, in essence a class dictatorship.

This section does not speak of the overthrow of capitalism, of what must be done to the capitalist State; it does not discuss our position on parliamentary methods of taking power; nor does it explain HOW we take power. It is not necessary to use the words "armed insurrection" but it is necessary to do more than leave an opening as the draft does, to say these things at a later date, when the draft says "the workers must be prepared to use whatever means are necessary" These things must be stated explicitly in the classic Marxist terminology or in other language which does not weaken or revise the idea.

It is true that some of these points are to be found in other sections of the document. But a programmatic draft is not a patch-work puzzle. And when these indispensable points are not included in the section in which they properly belong the material which is presented



in that section is less than Marxist, is centrist.

3. Not once does the document use the word communist or communism in a positive sense, as for example, a classless communist society; while on the other hand, the document frequently uses the words socialism and socialist, and as far as the use of these terms are concerned it lays down the line for the propaganda and literature of the new party. The exclusion of one term and the use of the other in our propaganda and literature will tend to create the impression that the Workers Party is a socialist party.

The content of the program shows a bad tendency to attribute to communism the errors of Stalinism and expresses its centrist character among other ways, by the inclusion of the negative aspects of Stalinism and a criticism of the CI and the CP, USA, and the rejection of the use of socialism and socialist in this connection.

4. The criticism of the socialist party considers the fundamental error of social democracy to be its concept of the state. This is true, but it would be fatal for internationalists to ignore the position of social democracy on the colonial question over which together with the question of the State the 2nd International hit the rocks. The colonial question involves other principle questions in addition to the question of the nature of the state. To ignore it would be to pave the way for a repetition of the same fundamental nationalist-opportunist errors which can flow from this omission.

5. In fact, the draft takes a step in this fatal direction,--In the section Colonial Peoples. The draft stands for self-determination for the colonial peoples and for immediate independence of the colonies. That is as far as it goes. Any liberal can accept this position. The real problem of the emancipation of the colonial peoples and oppressed nations really starts where the draft stops, and is not even indicated in the draft by so much as one word. Not even a reference is made in the draft to the fact that the struggle for emancipation in the colonies is organically related to the revolution in the United States, let alone the idea that the latter is, in the end, decisive for the former.

Moreover, a Marxian party in an imperialist country cannot consider revolutionary activity in the oppressed colonies as the exclusive work of its sister parties. It must assist them by all possible means in their struggle against the common enemy, both before and after it seizes power itself.

The basic points of the Lenin thesis-2nd Congress of the CI-- must be embodied in the draft.

6. The criticism of Stalinism is listed entirely as a criticism of Communists and the Third International. This is doubly significant in view of the fact that positive references to communism are omitted from the draft. Two different concepts of the degeneration of the Comintern are contained in the draft under the Muste-Hook-AWP formula that the "twin source of the degeneracy and impotence" of the CI and its sections are "the rise of fundamental anti-Marxian nationalist tendencies and the abandonment of the principle of workers' democracy." At first sight the "twin source" arrangement looks as though it gives eq-



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equal status to our Marxian conception and Hook's revisionism. But it is not so. A closer examination shows that the section is weighted in favor of Hook's revisionism. In the 2nd paragraph of the sub-section b. the Communist Party, they have allowed us to include in a watered-down form and with a far from correct emphasis and in totally false relations to party democracy, the theory of socialism in one country. In fact the section is so written that both centrists and Marxists can find a base for their conceptions in the same sections. To say that the revisionist concepts of Stalinism and the abandonment of workers' democracy are the twin errors is false. Because the nationalist revisionism which is Stalinism adopted the theory of socialism in one country it was forced to develop the system of bureaucracy which had arisen in Lenin's time on a world scale as its means of putting across its false concepts and retaining its power and prestige. That is the only correct way to present the (Note the original text ends at this point but probably means -- the programmatic Declaration for the New Party. Editor)

7. In discussing the New International, the draft says: "The Workers' Party is therefore prepared to cooperate with all groups and parties which stand on the same fundamental program as our own for the speediest possible establishment of the New International." This is not enough. On the question of an international party a Marxist programmatic draft must explain what we mean by an international. The centrists and reformists have a concept of a World Party which is fundamentally different from that which we Marxists have. In a Communist International the party is a world party with sections in each country which accept international discipline. This must be explicitly stated if the draft is to be a Marxist document.

8. The thesis does not take up the question of democratic centralism, although this is one of the points contained in Section 28 of Part 3 of our pre-conference thesis adopted by our NC and issued as an internal document. Section 28 lists 13 points which, it says, comprise a minimum Marxian program on which the League can unite with the AWP. A party based on democratic centralism is listed as point "e". The significance of its omission in the draft can be understood correctly only when it is considered in the light of the great emphasis which the draft, under the pressure of the centrists and the "softness" of our National Committee, lays on workers' democracy. Under cover of the formulation of workers' democracy the centrists want to exclude or water down to ambiguity every phase of democratic centralism.

They do not want a Marxist party. Why? Because they have in their ranks people who are right-wingers and congenital organizational Mensheviks upon whom they lean for support and with whom they would come into serious conflict over questions of discipline and loyalty in a party based on democratic centralism. The Marxists will have to contend with these people. Some they will transform into revolutionists and others they will have to drive out of the party. For the successful accomplishment of the former task as well as the latter they will need a party which clearly affirms the principle of democratic centralism. And in the first place they need it clearly stated in the program. As the draft stands now in this respect it gives the advantage to the centrists and right-wingers and handicaps the Bolsheviks.

9. The thesis does not deal with the question of the permanent



revolution. If anyone thinks the section dealing with world socialism covers this he is badly mistaken. No one insists that the draft discuss the permanent revolution in its full, rounded form. But if the draft is to be a Marxist document it must contain in simple language, if that is all we can get after trying to get more, the elements of the theory. On this basis we can fight inside of the new party to develop the programmatic elements to their highest level.

10. The thesis takes up the question of the allies of the working class and lists the Negro people as one of the allies. This is the Stalinist concept. And it opens the door for the entire Stalinist position for self-determination, a separate Negro republic in the so-called Black Belt, and inevitably the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. The oppressed colonial peoples, the farmers, etc. are the allies of ALL of the WORKERS of the country: Negro, White, etc. To entirely shut the door against Stalinist revisionism on the Negro question the draft must state that the negro share-croppers and the upper layers or strata of the oppressed Negro race of Negro bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, together with the colonial peoples, etc, farmers, etc, are the allies of all the American workers, negro and white, etc.

11. The role of the revolutionary party is treated inadequately. The draft correctly states the role of the party in leading the proletariat to the seizure of power. But there the draft stops. The whole post-Leninist period demonstrates, unfortunately in a negative sense, the enormously important role of the party in the transition period to Socialism. Stalinist disorientation and strangulation of the vanguard party has demonstrated that when the party is disoriented the working class is disoriented. Moreover the disorientation of the party and the class of the only workers' state have contributed mightily to the disorientation of the international party and class. When the party and class of the workers' state are disoriented they and the international party and class cannot advance correctly along the roads of the world revolution and the laying of the foundation of socialist economy. All this now is a part of the ABC of Marxism. It cannot be omitted from a programmatic declaration which professes to be and must be Marxist.

The section on the role of the party does not state the relation of the party to the workers' state and the workers' councils. Why? Obviously because this touches on the question over which Shadman for the League polemicized with Hook who really represented the AWP: the question of the dictatorship of the class and the so-called dictatorship of the party. Failure to state the relation in even an abstract form is an unprincipled concession to revisionism and centrism.

12. The thesis does not consider in its proper relationship the basis contradiction of capitalism. It refers to it; it speaks of phases of this contradiction, but it does not state what the contradiction itself is: the contradiction between socialized production and capitalist appropriation, which is the basis, within the sphere of production, of the contradictions of ACCUMULATION, of production and the world market, of production and national boundaries, of the enormous increase of productive capacity and an army of millions of permanent unemployed, etc.

Although the document continually speaks of internationalism the fact remains that its internationalist aspects are only secondary considerations. The document is not at all permeated with the spirit of



internationalism like the Declaration of Four. As a result the document is more of a national document in this sense with a national approach than an internationalist document. This is a programatic statement, not a propaganda document which has to be written down to the simplest level. Internationalism and the basic contradiction of world capitalism should run through it like a red thread. The role of American imperialism should be set into this internationalist context. Because the question of internationalism is handled incorrectly the concept of imperialism is incorrectly treated. Although a whole section is devoted to imperialism & war the draft fails to explain what imperialism is as a stage of world capitalism and reduces to a number of descriptive abstractions the sentences in the section. For the same reason the colonial question is presented so lightly. This is also the reason such basic concepts as the world party, the conquest of power, and the relationship of the party to the Soviets and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat are handled in centrist fashion.

The Museites are already pressing for further centrist modifications of the declaration. Against their pressure we must press our NC, not only to resist the pressure of the Musteites but to press for the inclusion of the points contained in the following amendments in order to make the document a Marxist one. We are confident if the NC will adopt this course it can prevail on the Musteites to make fundamental concessions.

(This document of the Communist League of America, Left Wing, ends here. Part II of the Suppressed Chapter continues.)

#### Liquidation into the Socialist Party.

I have already dealt briefly with the question of the "French Turn" of Trotsky. You must keep in mind that this problem was forced upon us as a parallel problem with the negotiations with several groups, of which only the Muste group negotiations materialized in organic unity. Our Left Wing was forming out of necessity; out of principle struggles maturing after the German defeat and the rise of Hitler. I was a top committee member, and at that the only new comrade added to the top committee as a full fledged member in the whole period of the American Trotskyism up to the liquidation. That was when our left wing fight developed and Gordon and Clarke were given a position on the top committee since they were needed not only against Shachtman but especially against the new left wing. This "French Turn" split EVERY GROUP IN EVERY COUNTRY. More comrades were lost in this period than were gained on a national scale in the Socialist entry.

Splits took place in Germany, France, England, Spain, Belgium, United States, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, China, and several other countries. The Left Opposition lost the POUM in Spain mainly because of the French turn and if we had held an international with the POUM inside, it may have been possible with this international force to turn the tide in Spain and also the advent of the imperialist war. This we will deal with later in more detail.

Let us return to the effects of the French Turn in America. I was on a tour for the League and wrote the secretary a letter which sums up my position at the very start:



Kansas City, Mo.

August 21-1934

Comrade (Secretary)

I have read what few documents you sent on the question of the French League. In addition to this we discussed this in brief before I left New York for Minneapolis. Now I have the following to say, and at the same time cast my vote in opposition to the position of comrade Trotsky.

To carry out a maneuver of sending the French League into the French Socialist Party (S.F.I.O.) at this critical juncture of the task of organizing a Fourth International and with the extremely relative short period ahead for decisive action in France would, in my opinion, retard the world labor movement, our objective and result in just the opposite of what comrade Trotsky claims.

I think the difficult organizational position we are in, in France is to a great extent due to the organizational mistakes of our European sections in the immediate past period since we adopted the perspective of the Fourth International. These past mistakes cannot be corrected by another mistake, entry into the SFIO, nor is there any other short cut to the masses.

I consider comrade Trotsky mainly responsible for this. It seems as though his whole political life has been such that his sharp, brilliant and scientific theoretical and political positions have always been blunted by his own organizational blunders. In France, he is repeating this. The examples of Marx' action in 1848, Plekanov's action and Lenin's advice to the British section proves other than what the document desires.

It was fortunate that Trotsky's faction in 1917 could join Lenin's PARTY, otherwise Trotsky's brilliant ability could not have been exploited for the interests of the Soviet Union and the world revolution.

We need political INDEPENDENCE through a party, political independence of a faction in the present French situation and in action it can become a party. Through united front action on all fields and through faction work in all worker's organizations we can reach the masses. A split in the SP is inevitable. WE MUST HAVE A FACTION WITHIN BUT WE MUST NOT DISSOLVE OUR LEAGUE. (present emphasis)

The League is capable as an independent faction, until unity with other forces are obtained to build a Marxian Party.

..... Building a faction within the SP and entering enmass as a body is entirely two different things.

The principle question of independence of a political party cannot be brushed aside because we are only a faction and an embryo of a party. Our weakness all the more calls for political clarity.

..... We need a stronger IS (International Secretariat) It needs a French League. The French League needs a faction within the SP. The International must subsidize the French League.

My international resolution of last January, which has not been



acted upon one way or the other (This was August, present emphasis) by our NEC at least laid the basis for action and to avoid the present developments.

....Rather than consolidation of our own faction internationally, first the IS and Trotsky have floundered around in negotiations not based upon rounded organizational programatic steps. The NEC in its negotiations for one year with only a draft program on this question this June has committed the same error.

Fraternally yours,

Hugo Oehler

At this early date a clear line of opposition to the liquidation policy was laid down and from then on one can understand why Cannon and others could only resort to slander to cover up their capitulation. They repeated in the Left Opposition against the left what the Stalinists did in the CP against the Left Opposition. They answered political arguments with slander and name calling.

TO BE CONTINUED

The article above is a reply to James P. Cannon's book, "The History of American Trotskyism. It appears serially in the International News.

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# A CRITICISM OF THE LEFT COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

The Ultra-Lefts, right or wrong, who are intransigent in their main political line have kept alive a faction all through the days of Fascist suppression in Italy and in Europe through the rise of power of Hitler (after Mussolini) and after world war two. These revolutionists must be given credit for their class struggle against capitalism, even though from the standpoint of Marxism they are wrong on several questions. One thing can be said for them, and it is a mountain--that they have not capitulated to the different currents and tendencies of capitalism. This cannot be said for the different factions of centrism, such as Cannonism, Schachmanism, Prouism, and left factions of social democracy--as well as factions of the anarchists.

History has favored the Italian Faction of the Communists of yesterday, the Bordiguists. Since history has brought Italy to the fore in the post war situation and enabled the Left Communists to grow here as the POUM grew in Spain after 1936. But will history favor the left communists or will they go down the road the POUM took in Spain; or the Trotskyites on an international scale? Now their program is decisive, as yesterday the program of these former groups was decisive. That is--if they have a Marxian program they have a good opportunity of turning the tide, of changing the course of mankind--from decay Capitalism to growing Socialism. Not the Socialism of England, or the Second International, but the Socialism and/or Communism of Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

The Left Communists have the advantage of growth, due to the objective conditions in Italy that favor them today as it favored the POUM yesterday. Yesterday the POUM and its program failed miserably (except its left wing under Rebull) so today what will the left communists do in Italy? They have issued the Autumn 1949 quarterly, the INTERNATIONALIST, and its 56 printed pages. They present their main program and their main line of march. Let us consider this and see what the balance sheet is.

The first chapeer of this magazine, after the introduction deals with, "A Short History of the Left Communist International". And what a history? The Stalinists rewrite history to suit their own fake line; the Trotskyites rewrite history to fit their centrism, so does the POUM--and now the Left Communists do the same. Many of their old time comrades will cringe at this new version of history. Many have had long polemics in past years on the disputed questions which appear in this issue of the magazine, and most important past disputes in the literature of the Bordiguists.

Here is an example; "The path that the Left Communists indicate is the one that Lenin himself followed in face of the war of 1914-18, under different historic conditions, but facing an identical phenomenon of opportunist corruption of Social-Democratic parties; this is the path of the faction work." Add to this sentence the following when the Left Communists speak of the Communist International and WHO and WHOM criticized them. "Trotsky replied to all the critics of the policies of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (and for whom he was the reporter against us) fought by the Communists of Italy, making his own unconditionally, the thesis of the first four Congresses of the International." (Page 15)



Keep in mind the above two opposite quotations--Lenin is OK--and Trotsky is the scoundrel--and nowhere in the entire document do the Left Communists take up Lenin's CRITICISM OF THESE COMRADES, nor do they admit the FACT that Lenin and Trotsky were ONE in their dispute in the first four Congresses against the Ultra-Lefts.

This is NOT the way to rewrite history. IT was LENIN, not Trotsky, who issued his famous pamphlet, "Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder", a polemic against the Italian, German, and other Leftists. Trotsky was merely carrying out, in full agreement the line of Lenin. But today, 1949, the ultra-lefts try to claim Lenin is OK, and Trotsky IN THAT PERIOD WAS WRONG. No, history will not substantiate such fake rewriting, no more than it will substantiate Cannon's rewriting of the American History of Trotskyism. If you want to be honest with yourself and the working class, and in criticizing Trotsky for his role in this period, then you must also criticize Lenin for his leadership in this fight against the left and his book against the ultra-lefts.

This you not only fail to do. But on the contrary, you try to leave the impression that YOU are carrying on the fight of Lenin against opportunism, Socialism, Stalinism, Trotskyism, and what not.

We will return to Lenin's pamphlet against the ultra-lefts, because we want to know how you act and think today about his criticism of you. You have graciously ignored his thesis SINCE FASCISM HAS BEEN OUSTED IN ITALY. Why? Why the silence on such a number of important questions?

#### Trotsky and the Left Communists

The quarterly we speak of (Autumn, 1949) deals in length with Trotsky. He is their whipping boy. But is it not a bit late? And is it not a bit unethical to indulge in the arguments you present? We have nothing in common with capitalist (bourgeois ethics) but we do hold high proletarian (working class) ethical relations. (I deliberately mixed up these two English-French terms)

The RWL split with Trotsky in the early thirties, after the German defeat and before the Spanish defeat. We are not Trotskyites, or a faction of Trotskyism; as our PROGRAM WILL ATTEST. But we DEMAND THAT HISTORY BE PRESERVED factually. Let the chips fall where they may. We will defend Trotsky against Stalinism, and others on political points where he is correct; just like we will defend any one, centrism against reformism; reformism against capitalism, ultra-lefts against opportunism--where they are factual and correct. We will do this, and make our defense within the framework of historical materialism, Marxism.

In this "short history" of the Left Communists, what do they say about Trotsky? Let us take a few important quotations: "The proof is that shortly before the victory, in Germany, Hitler, in 1933, to whom the German Proletariat which would have completely changed the situation."....

"The political tasks which Trotsky proposed to the Communist Left of all countries flowed of course from his theoretical and political analysis."

"Because he considered the state property (which he called collective) as progressive and foresaw an inevitable war (i.e. World War II) between the Soviet State and the bourgeois states, the strategic objec-



tive which, he assigned to the left was the defense of the U.S.S.R."

Continuing with several sentences the Left says, speaking of THEIR position against Trotsky, "It opened in other period in which capitalism faces the 'Worker's State and 'Communist' Parties fighting for socialism in one-country." (Pages 13-14)

Now we have it--Trotsky fought for the defense of the Soviet Union and the Bordiguists fought against the theory of socialism in one country in this previous period. Nothing is farther from the FACT. Let us take up all these statements step by step.

In the first place, even though we disagree principally with Trotsky during and after the German defeat, in all due respect to the facts, Trotsky did NOT say that the German Communist PARTY was the key to the International situation. This is a slight of words. Trotsky said GERMANY was the key to the international situation. Trotsky said that IF the Communist Party did NOT adopt the program he presented than Hitler WOULD TAKE POWER. He, Trotsky, based his premise on his PROGRAM for the Communist Party. They rejected his analysis. The Stalinist analysis was the opposite. In this period the Left Communists said nothing, they did not agree with Trotsky or against Trotsky. Let them quote from documents of that period. If you argue against Trotsky at all, you can only argue against his position that he did not have a force capable and he advocated the CP to adopt his CORRECT PROGRAM (history proves his correctness in the analysis) and you can argue that he should have not wasted time on the CP. (Check his documents and program for Germany of this period)

But the Left Communists claim he wanted the CP to carry through the revolution on THEIR PROGRAM--that is the implication. Nothing is farther from the truth.

But more important than this aspect of the problem is the quotation by the Left Communists that they, the Left Communists, rejected the Stalinist theory of Socialism in one country and that Trotsky stood for the defense of the Soviet Union AS THE MAIN LINE OF MARCH. This is false to the core. It was Trotsky, not the Left Communists, not the Bordiguists--but the Left Opposition, that presented the theoretical premise against the Stalinist theory of "Socialism in One Country". It was the Trotsky faction, the Left Opposition, that advocated the "permanent revolution" the world revolution, the extension of the October revolution--against the Stalinist theory of "border patrols" for the communist parties and the "defense of the Soviet Union."

The Bordiguists, through this bulletin are trying to attribute to Trotsky the position of Stalin and are taking over unto themselves the position of Trotsky and the Left Opposition. The printed material in several languages vindicated Trotsky--that he was the FIRST to oppose the "theory of socialism in one country". It also vindicates him and the left opposition against the Bordiguists regarding the question of the "defense of the Soviet Union". Yes we defend the Soviet Union--but as our SHORT lever, our long lever is the "permanent revolution", the extension of the October Revolution of 1917. It was Stalin and Stalinism, not Trotsky and the Left Opposition that advocated as the main line--the defense of the Soviet Union.



Let the Bordiguists quote from documents prior or equal in date to Trotsky on this important theoretical and principle question. Candon and Shachtman have long ago forgotten this aspect of Trotskyism, except lip-service to words, not deeds.

We, of the RWL, have our differences with the Left opposition during and after the German defeat (Hitler seizure of Power) our documents deal with this phase. (See the series of articles on "A Suppressed Chapter from the History of Trotskyism. Editor Note) But the above points are in favor of Trotsky and not the ultra-lefts.

Furthermore, the "Left Communists say, Italian Communism was enabled to say to Trotsky that, "it is precisely after the defeat of the world proletariat in Feb., 1933, in Germany that it opened the phase of the best relations between the Capitalist States and the Soviet State." (page 14)

This is a wrong analysis of factual relations in the period of 1933-45. We, the RWL, were the only force to point out that the Hitler\*Stalin Pact, contrary to words of the pact or opinions of the press, was merely a prelude and preparation for WAR against the Soviet Union by the extreme right of the exploiters, the fascists. The blurring over of this relation between Fascism and bourgeois-democracy by the ultra-lefts is not secondary but fundamental in their errors. What the Left-Communists see as a "best-relations" between capitalism and the Soviet Union, is in reality, the show-down (decisive fight approaching) between Fascism and Communism through the warped forms of Stalinism and Hitler Fascism. The treaty between Hitler and Stalin, we, the RWL, predicted would end in war. This, history confirmed. The relations with capitalist democracy ended in a bitter "cold war" between the United States and its satellites, and the Soviet Union and theirs. This is contrary to the Ultra-left analysis. The capitalist democrats used the Stalinists and the Soviet Union, and the workers they controlled in Italy, France and other countries of Europe TO STEM THE TIDE OF POST WAR REVOLUTION, TO DROWN IN BLOOD THE WORKERS REVOLTS, TO HOLD IN CHECK THE WORKERS MOVEMENTS, through the resistance movements in France, Italy, Belgium, and all those countries where Anglo-American imperialism with Stalinism dominated the struggle of the underground forces against fascism. The exploiters used Stalinism in the second imperialist war as they used social democracy in the first imperialist war. But this was preparation for WAR against the Soviet Union, as facts today prove; no reconciliation, as the left communists claim.

Throughout these pages the Left Communists argue against Trotsky and claim that they are the followers of Lenin. Let them answer the above arguments, Lenin's, against the Ultra-Lefts, and Trotsky's, against the theory of socialism in one country, which they try to usurp.

The left communists say, "Consequently, the Italian fraction of the Communist Party of Italy rejected the perspective which Trotsky considered inevitable, of a violent attack against the USSR, and envisaged the contrary, the strengthening of the links between the USSR and the capitalist states without implying that the Statified property would be overthrown." (Page 14)

The whole complex thought is contrary to immediate historical facts. The Fascists bloc DID CARRY THROUGH A VIOLENT ATTACK ON THE USSR, contrary to the stupid opinion of the left communists. The fascists were un-



successful in their assault. If they had defeated the USSR; they could easily defeat the capitalist democracies. Mussolini would still be a "big shot" in Italy. The Fascists would rule the world. The ultra-lefts would either be killed or in jail with the other revolutionists. After the USSR stopped Hitler cold, and after the imperialist phase of the war was over, the war between capitalism and the Soviet Union was INTENSIFIED, the so-called "cold-war" as it is known. This also contradicts the ultra-left thesis. Today a war between capitalism and the USSR is inevitable. The time element is "jerky" and shifting—but the fundamental Trotsky thesis of that period—which was the thesis of the WHOLE LEFT OPPOSITION, REMAINS a fundamental analysis.

The ultra-lefts MIX UP Stalinism with the USSR because they consider the USSR capitalist. The Stalinists are doing everything possible to check, to stop, to drown in blood the extension of the October Revolution. But the capitalists, while using Stalinism as their left arm against the workers are night and day preparing an inevitable war against the Soviet Union. The Ultra-Lefts do not see a distinction between reactionary capitalist trade union leaders and the Union; but the exploiters do—and the exploiters act accordingly. This ultra-leftism, if followed by workers will blind them to the dialectical contradictions of present day society between Stalinism and the USSR.

Do the Ultra-Lefts claim that the devastation of the major part of European Russia by the Fascist armies, "opened the phase of the best relations between the capitalist states and the Soviet State." (page 14) ???????????

When the left communists criticize the Trotskyites for liquidating their independent forces into the parties of the Second International we of the RWL can agree. But we do not agree in hindsight. We were the first, not the ultra-lefts, in fighting the Trotskyites on an international scale for this principle error. We were the first to lay down a theoretical position against Trotsky's position of the "French Turn". Let the Ultra-Lefts show their material of that period against Trotsky and compare it to OURS; it will show that we, the RWL led and the Left Communists followed. Now they claim that they were the leaders. We don't object to this. We object to their lack of POLITICAL AND THEORETICAL ANALYSIS, which we the RWL laid down in minute detail.

#### Stalinism--Centrism??

Another, secondary, but important aspect of the problem, is the fact that throughout the document we deal with, the left communists refer to Stalinism as Centrism. Again they miss the boat. Even the centrist Trotskyites, not to speak of the RWL, changed their analysis of Stalinism, from centrism to reformism in the period of the German defeat of 1933, when Hitler came to power. Why do the ultra-lefts still speak of Stalinism as Centrism? Stalinism is a right wing reformist movement. In fact some go so far as to call it anti-working class today. We, the RWL, call the Stalinists a reformist current, (reform in words, and counter-revolutionary in action.) The Ultra-lefts are way behind on proper analysis, even though they use harsh adjectives in daily conversation.

#### THE FRYING PAN AND THE SKILLET

The document says, "It is convenient to recall at this point that the



Italian left abandoned the name 'Left Fraction of the Communist Party of Italy' for the 'Italian Fraction of the Left Communist International', at its Congress of 1935." ( p. 19 )

Take this above statement with the following, "Thus the Left Fraction of the Communist Party of Italy opposed the new Trotskyist orientation, as it opposed the politics of reforming the Third International." (p.16) First they attributed falsely to Trotsky the "defense of the Soviet Union" which was a secondary axis in the "permanent revolution" and secondarily in the previous quotation the Left communists say that they no longer considered themselves a faction of the communists AFTER 1935. If you check history, and especially the history of the Left Opposition in which Trotsky was the leader, you will find that the ultra-lefts -- FOLLOWED Trotsky in rejecting the C.I.

Since they admit it was in 1935 that they rejected the concept of a faction of the C.I., it means that the Left Opposition rejected this concept PRIOR TO THE ULTRA-LEFTS. But now they claim they led, when in reality, out of their own writings, they followed Trotsky in his rejection of the C.I. If the ultra-lefts, the Bordiguists waited until 1935 to no longer consider themselves a fraction of the CI; it means that they in time and in theory, followed the Left Opposition after the German defeat in working toward building a new INTERNATIONAL.

Here we part company with both factions. Whereas the ultra-lefts followed the left opposition, according to their own words, we, who now constitute the RWL, parted company with the Trotskyites and worked toward independent class activity when Trotsky and others started the stampede towards joining the parties of the Second International. We may add, with no malice, that now the Left Communists speak of this period of the Left Opposition, but they were very silent in Political analysis at the time of the event.

When the Left Communists speak of the fact that they were opposed to the reform of the Third International (page 16) but admit that they continued as a faction until (page 19) 1935 which was after the Left Opposition called for new parties, they, the ultra-lefts, are begging the question.

### Class Instinct

We would like to know as Marxists what class instinct is? They say on page 25 . . . . .; "Only this class instinct is our guide up to this point, . . ." When they run short of arguments they resort to "class instinct". We are anxious to know about this "scientific thing".

### "Spontaneously"

In several places the document speaks of "spontaneously" the workers establish administrative organs of state power, etc. This means that these comrades cling to their spontaneity theory. Some of the German ultra-left comrades used this theory. They thought capitalism would automatically breakdown. Others used it to mean that the workers would automatically take power when the crisis of capitalism reached a certain point; others used it for the idea of an automatic social development of the workers towards socialism.



such a state." (p. 43)

The stability of the state and the degree of support the workers give this, exploiters state, developing out of the crisis does NOT determine the whole revolutionary question and the formation of the party. These two factors only determine the amount of mass influence the REVOLUTIONARY MARXIAN ORGANIZATION can obtain for its program of socialism and state power. If the cadre, the faction does not have a party so late, when the crisis, the lefts speak of arrives; than the problems of the vanguard are doubled. They must build the party and win the masses. But if they have a party as Lenin had in 1917 than they can use this party to gain mass influence. The formation of a party in each and every country, in addition to the correctness of the cadre's program in theory, strategy and TACTICS, must also include day to day ACTION in the class struggle to the degree that the group or faction can participate.

### The Failure of the State.

"In the liberalist epoch, the failure of the state appears at the end of a revolutionary wave. In the epoch of State Capitalism the failure of the State appears at the beginning of a revolutionary period (p. 39) This concept of the State and the crisis of capitalism is too mechanical and schematic. It does have an element of truth, but is not factual. Instead of speaking of the liberalist epoch and the State Capitalist epoch, which does not fit the economic relations of the crisis of capitalism, we will speak of the developing stage, and the decay stage of capitalism. Yesterday, in the developing stage, it was not all liberalistic, and today in the decay stage it is not all State capitalism, even though state intervention must continue to prevent further decay. In the liberalist epoch we had plenty of steps toward state capitalism and plenty of reaction; and in the state capitalist epoch these comrades speak of we have liberalist policies, different in form, but the same in content. Yesterday it was liberalist under capitalist parties; now when the crisis develops it is liberalist under Social Democracy, the Labor Party, the actions of the Anarchists in Spain, etc., i.e., under Social Reformism, to stem the tide of revolution until reaction can reorganize its forces and its state.

The schema of the ultra-lefts is similar to the many schemas of the Stalinists in this way. In analyzing problems, the Stalinists either saw a world wide revolutionary situation, or a world wide non-revolutionary situation; or only black reaction, or everybody as fellow travelers. The ultra-lefts see State Capitalism everywhere today, in Russia, in all capitalist countries, etc.

More important is the fact that the failure of the State will not always APPEAR AT THE BEGINNING of a revolutionary period as this thesis claims. In the decay of capitalism there are sharp turns and shifts, which will call for different strategies and tactics almost overnight--not different programs. When the failure of the state arrives, at this or that juncture it can easily be determined by a Marxian leadership in each country and in each crisis. It would be just as fatal to see this failure of the state too soon as it would be to see it too late. It cannot be laid down as a blue print that in the decay stage it will always arrive at the beginning of the crisis.



### The Left Communists Criticize Those to the Right.

In the introduction to this quarterly the "Left Communists" lump together all groups and factions to the right of them and criticize them in one broadside. They speak of those groups (Trotskyites) who support the Labor Parties, the Labor Party governments, the different forms of bourgeois democracy, etc. We of the RWL oppose these concepts from the left. We have ample literature to reveal our position on Trotskyism regarding these questions. The ultra-lefts condemn those who in one form or another support the state in the Soviet Union, or the economy, no matter what they say about Stalinism. But in this case the Schachtmanites, (Independent Socialist League) agree with the Ultra-Lefts. Their position is basically the same, as is the case of many Trotsky factions, even though different terms are used. The Cannonites (Socialist Workers Party) hold to the old Trotsky position on the Soviet Union. But this old Trotsky position is not the position of the Revolutionary Workers League.

Whereas, the Cannonites call for "material aid and political criticism" for Stalinism in time of war (as they did for the People's Front in Spain) we reject ALL material aid to Stalinism at anytime. (Ed. emphasis) We give our material aid to the revolutionary Marxists or independent new genuine Soviets when they develop in Stalinist areas.

The Cannonites claim that Stalinism can in certain situations play a progressive role; just like they claim that under given conditions the trade union bureaucrats can play a progressive role. We of the RWL say AT NO TIME can Stalinism, or the bourgeois reformists, or the social reformists play a progressive role. (Ed. Emphasis) These opportunists of all shades can only play a reactionary role. The Soviet Union, the economy below it; which is not Stalinism; as well as the Trade Union, which is not the capitalist trade union leaders, the organs, CAN PLAY A PROGRESSIVE ROLE in spite of their reactionary leaders in this or that given situation.

This the ultra-lefts do not understand any more than the Centrists understand. But we ask, since we are to the left of these, and many other questions, from Trotskyism; and we are to the right of the "Left Communists" -- where do we stand? Trotskyism calls us ultra-lefts, and the ultra-lefts call us Centrists. We are neither, we have a revolutionary program of Marxism, and correctly so. The "Left Communists", are to the left of us as ultra-lefts, and the Trotskyites are to the right of us as Centrists.